More Invasive Plant Q/As

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

In addition to the poison ivy question answered in the last *Herald* edition, here are replies to some more commonly asked questions:

Q: What does English ivy look like?
A: Here is a picture of it. These websites provide more images including how it harms trees:
https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=3027
https://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/animals-and-plants/noxious-weeds/weed-identification/english-ivy.aspx

Figure 1. English ivy is smothering the groundcover in this photograph.

Q: Are English ivy and poison ivy the same plant?
A: No, they are completely unrelated vines. Poison ivy is a native plant with three, shiny leaves and gives many people a rash after contacting the plant. It is also an important food source for native wildlife and coexists with other plants and trees. English ivy is a European vine that smothers to death both trees and herbaceous plants, poses little to no nutritional value to wildlife, and few humans get allergies from the plant.

Q: I've got a little English ivy in my yard and always keep it well controlled. Is that tiny patch going to cause problems?
A: Hypothetically, that patch is not a problem if you
1) always maintain that patch,
2) prevent it from creeping into other properties or parks,
3) never let it climb (where it flowers and seeds), and
4) live on that property throughout eternity.

Realistically, that little patch has potential of becoming a full-blown problem. If you sell your house, there is no guarantee that the new owners will keep the ivy under wraps. Even if you rip up the patch prior to selling the property, chances are enough root will remain and pop new vines. [I constantly survey "completed" IMA sites to eradicate overlooked roots.] If the new owners neglect to control the English ivy sprouts, a problem site is born. The best strategy is to remove small patches before they become a nuisance.

Q: A few years ago, I bought a bunch of plants and now I learn that they are listed as "invasive." What should I do about it?
A: I can sympathize with that predicament. My deceased grandparents loved Russian olive, especially how the blossoms fill the air with wonderfully sweet aromas. When moving to KPW, I transplanted a sapling originally from their yard as a reminder of better times. As the robust bush rapidly matured, other plants around it withered. I knew that some birds ate the fruits (thinking that's good), and soon little Russian olives sprouted around the yard. As I learned about invasive plants, I read how Russian and autumn olives became problematic throughout much of the U.S. Besides thriving and spreading like weeds, olives release chemicals into the soil to prevent other plants' growth and competition; this natural, plant-on-plant chemical defense is called "allelopathy." The species I planted and that my grandparents loved was a menace. My grandparents also loved nature, though they were unaware of ecologically invasive plants in their lifetime. Shelving emotional attachments for the greater good, the Russian olive and all seedlings were removed. Through composting and successive annual, then perennial plantings, the soil will recover until I can plant a native shrub. I know my grandparents would be happy with my resolution. I hope this story inspires you in your decision.

Q: I would like to add native plants to my yard and know that I should not dig up plants from parklands. However, I am having trouble finding a store that carries a good native supply. Do you have any recommendations?
A: First, thank you for leaving native plants in parks. Between aggressive, exotic plants assaulting local forests and "plant poachers" stealing desirable natives, the local ecology is taking a double hit! Many local nurseries carry popular indigenous cultivars, such as winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), flowering dogwoods (*Cornus florida*), Eastern redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*), red maples (*Acer rubrum*), oaks (e.g., *Quercus alba*, *Q. palustris, Q. velutina*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), purple Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), sensitive ferns (*Onoclea sensibilis*), Christmas ferns (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), ostrich ferns (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*), wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), and creeping phlox (e.g., *Phlox stolonifera*).

Other species, such as native azaleas (e.g., *Rhododendron viscosum*), buttonbushes (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), American persimmons (*Diospyros virginiana*), American beautyberries (e.g., *Callicarpa americana*), wild blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*, *V. angustifolium*), turtleheads (e.g., *Chelone glabra*), *Trilliums*, jack-in-the-pulpits (*Arisaema triphyllum*), and orchids (e.g., *Spiranthes odorata*) are carried by specialty commercial nurseries and native plant non-profit organizations. This web resource provides more native options: http://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/. A great place to learn about centers specializing in native plants is during IMA workdays as sometimes volunteers talk about these topics (another reason to join an IMA session)!

Also, Green Spring Gardens has small plant sales held every Saturday, now through May 10th, from 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Additionally to specimens cultivated on site, several local vendors sell plants at the park. If you can only visit Green Spring once, visit their humongous plant sale on Saturday, May 17th from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m, where over 40 mid-Atlantic organizations will sell plants. Some of these groups specialize in native plants, others will be happy to show what natives they have or direct you to the appropriate tents. If you are a botanical novice, most of the venders are friendly and eager to share their knowledge. Come early to get both a great selection and inspiration from the park's demonstration gardens! For more information, visit http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/events.htm.

We've just investigated the invasive plant problem from unique angles. One way to learn is through asking questions. Another great way is to join an IMA workday, where everyone works towards a better environment and leaves with knowledge. If you have questions about invasive plants, habitat restoration, or would like to join an IMA workday, please contact me: greg@grsykes.com.

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